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THE
SPEECH

OF

NATHANIEL BRASSEY HALHED, Esq.

[PRICE SIXPENCE.]



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OF
NATHANIEL BRASSEY HALHED, Esq. K

DELIVERED IN THE
HOUSE OF COMMONS,
ON
TUESDAY, MARCH 31, 1795,
RESPECTING THE
CONFINEMENT OF MR. BROTHERS,
THE PROPHET.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR B. CROSBY, NO. 4, STATIONERS COURT,
LUDGATE STREET.

1795.

THE
SPEECH

MATTHEW BRADY LIMITED, NO.

HOUSE OF COMMONS



CONTENTS OF MR. BROTHERS

THE SPEECH

LONDON

PRINTED BY J. B. COOPER, 15, ABchurch Lane, LONDON, E.C. 4.

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NATHANIEL BRASSEY HALHED, ESQ.
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ALTHOUGH the motion I am about to submit to the house be strictly conformable to the tenor of the notice I gave yesterday; yet I must beg explicitly to be understood as having nothing to say which can possibly give offence to any gentleman who hears me, as if dictated by any animosity, or the spirit of party. Much more do I desire most pointedly to abjure all intention of throwing out a single hint against the executive government of this country, or any one of the
honourable

honourable persons who compose it. I should indeed think myself singularly happy if I could, by any form of words, contrive so far to disarm the prejudice (if any such exist, which I do not know) against me, as to obtain a fair and patient hearing for what I shall have the honour to offer, were it merely in consideration of that uniform and respectful silence which I have hitherto observed ever since I have had a seat in parliament.

In the first place, I hope gentlemen will acquit me of all personal motives in the part I now take, or in any wherein I have lately engaged. Indeed, it is well known, that I have made some sacrifices, both on the score of friendship and of interest; nor does it hitherto appear, that, by my new line of conduct, I have any where obtained an equivalent. At least, I think I may be permitted loudly to assert, that I have no sinister intention whatsoever; that I have no intercourse with any man, or set of men, public or private, whose principles or whose actions have,

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as far as I can judge, tended to the detriment of my country, or any of my countrymen; and that, in separating myself from those gentlemen, with whom I had always been used to act, on the question of War and Peace, I have conducted myself in a fair, open, and conscientious manner, strictly within my duty as a member of parliament, and my honour as a gentleman.

Now, Sir, to come more immediately to the subject of my intended motion: I flatter myself I shall not be deemed to convey any offensive meaning, if I express myself to have felt very great surprize, when, on the 4th of this month, Richard Brothers was taken up by a warrant from the Secretary of State, and, as I have been told by the messenger in whose custody he now is, on suspicion of treasonable practices. I say, I may well be surprised, because I, who am conscious that not a thought, word, or action of my life ever had the remotest tendency towards such crimes, have been, for near

two months back, in the habit of seeing him very frequently, without perceiving in him the slightest symptom that could indicate any bad design; and because I had latterly observed that his house, in the forenoon, was constantly filled by persons of quality and fortune, of both sexes, and the street crowded with their carriages—none of which persons, I apprehend, would have once thought of paying him a single visit, much less of repeating it, if they could have conceived that they were fostering, encouraging, aiding, and abetting a traitor.—Government, therefore, must have some peculiar information on the subject, of which both I and the persons to whom I allude may be supposed ignorant; and, while I bow with the most unfeigned submission to the authority of the state, I hope to be indulged with speaking of Mr. Brothers in regard to *that which I do know.*

As a private man, Mr. Brothers is certainly a most unexceptionable character; and

and I have heard he was always much respected and esteemed in the navy. To his affability, moderation, and good sense in society, it is impossible but all those who have visited him must bear concordant testimony.

But he has written two very extraordinary books—Aye, Sir, there's the rub. 'The man was very well apart from his pen and ink: but when he mounted on the Pegasus of Prophecy, he has galloped over all our heads, at the risk, every moment, of dashing out our brains, together with his own.' Perhaps, for indeed I speak only by conjecture, perhaps, I say, these books may be the cause of his present detention. But if so, I may reasonably express my astonishment that *they* should still be permitted full and free circulation; so much so, that I can assure gentlemen, from my own knowledge, the sale of them has most rapidly and inconceivably increased since the confinement of their author. Every man must feel that treason should not

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be permitted to disseminate itself in this manner; and therefore, finding that no obstacle whatever has been opposed to the vent of those publications, I must necessarily doubt, I say, whether or not they are the cause of Mr. Brothers's imprisonment. At least, however, while they are not prosecuted, nor even threatened, I am at liberty, I conceive, to buy them, to read them, to make my own comments on them, and to disperse them in whatever manner I chuse, and all without intending, much less without giving, any offence to the government of this country.

These books, Sir, if I may be supposed sufficiently *compos mentis* to form any judgment on the subject, appear to me to be founded on principles which every one of us acknowledge and avow, namely, the common broad principles of christianity, as are contained in the Bible. Christianity, we all know, is subdivided into an innumerable multiplicity of sects, who differ from each other in more or fewer subordinate articles; but

but they must all necessarily admit the interference, in some shape or other, of God in the government of the world, and the authenticity of the scriptures, on which all christianity depends. Now, though I do not say it is altogether orthodox yet it certainly is not inadmissible in this free country, where a translation of the whole Bible is published in the vernacular tongue, by royal authority, for any man to build upon those scriptures a theory of his own, in conformity to that which he may conceive to be their true and recondite meaning; always, however, I most implicitly allow, in perfect submission to the laws and police of the country. As a matter most in point, I shall beg leave to instance the very numerous and very discordant commentaries which have been written, more in this kingdom than in any other, on the prophecies contained in the Old and New Testament. I shall be bold to say, that by the very canons of the Anglican church the authenticity of the prophecies themselves is put out of all

doubt; all the difference that can exist in opinion, must necessarily be on the score of interpretation.

One man finds the whole of their mysterious and hidden allusions to bear exclusively on Rome, and another on Turkey. France is by some deemed the grand theatre of their denunciations; by others, perhaps Germany or Poland; but if one solitary individual happen to pitch on Great Britain as the destined spot for the elucidation of these enigmatical predictions, surely it is not unreasonable that he should request cool and dispassionate investigation of the grounds of his assertion, before you condemn him to fire and faggot. We have all heard and thought that persecutions for religious opinions were annihilated in England, and that toleration was everywhere making a rapid progress. This toleration is what I now solicit; not immediately on Mr. Brothers's account, but on my own. I solicit it in the present instance for the few more minutes in which I shall detain

tain the house, and I shall then solicit it for a candid perusal of the papers which I mean to make the subject of this day's motion,

I have heard, but I really know it not on any certain authority, that Mr. Brothers's arrest proceeds from an expression in one of the very last pages of the last edition of his book, dated 20th of February, relative to the king. If I may do it without offence, I will venture to read that passage, and endeavour to shew that it contains no treasonable or inflammatory matter whatever. I have selected this particular passage, because I have very good information that the jury, impannelled to try him for insanity, desired him to read it, and say if he avowed it; both of which he did; and really, Sir, any man may do the same, without any colour of suspicion for treasonable practices. Here it is, page 110.

“ The Lord God commands me to say to you, George the third, King of England, that immediately on my being revealed in

London

London to the Hebrews, as their prince, and to all nations as their governor, your crown must be delivered up to me, that all your power and authority may cease." Now, Sir, it is fair to say, that if I were to annex a palpable impossibility to such a proposition, I might make a similar demand on the king. I do not mean that it might not be deemed indecent or insulting, but we see greater and more scandalous liberties taken every day with his Majesty in pamphlets, newspapers, and print-shops. If, for instance, I were to assert, that on some future day, I should ascend to the top of St. Paul's, and from thence fly over London, and in sight of all its inhabitants, to Westminster Abbey, after which the King must seat me on his throne, and kiss my great toe : most people, I allow, would think me mad ; but I certainly should not dream of being apprehended for treason. What has Mr. Brothers said ? He has said, that he shall be revealed to the people of London, by a sign similar to that of Moses, namely, turning a common hazle stick into a serpent,

a serpent, and re-converting it into a rod; a fact fully as impossible to all human comprehension as my flying from St. Paul's to Westminster Abbey; and that he shall then be visibly accompanied by an angel, in the form of a flame of fire; after which the King must do so and so. The whole, therefore, depends on the previous performance of a fact, which certainly no one member of administration deems within the verge of possibility. I must honestly confess, that, in this instance, the very opposite construction to that of treasonable intention appears self-evident; the prophet engages to accomplish his part of the miracle first: after which, he says, the King will perform the second miracle, namely, send his crown to an obscure individual, now his own subject, and actually his prisoner. Had the condition been reversed, the plea of treason would not have been so ill founded, and the ignorant, the profligate, or the ill-intentioned, might have made a handle of it to the detriment of the monarch,

narch, if a sufficient number of profelytes could have been obtained to co-operate in the purpose. All the inference I pretend to draw from this circumstance, is the following:— If the asserted mission of this prophet be true, and if he be destined to perform the miracle alluded to, his present imprisonment will be no obstacle at all. If there be no foundation for his predictions, I think an innocent man is made uselessly to suffer for a mental delusion, which did not require such severity. For, without being an enthusiast, I hope I may for once apply a couple of verses from the book which we all profess to hold in veneration; they are the 38th and 39th verses of the 9th chapter of Acts— “And now I say unto you, refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it, lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.”—And here, Sir, it may not be unreasonable to remark, that Mr. Brothers had actually renounced seeing all
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indiscriminate visitors two days before he was arrested by order of government: and to this circumstance he alludes, in one of the last pages of the last addition to his book, namely, where he says—"The Lord God commands me to inform all men, as a prevention in future to their asking unnecessary questions, that all that is proper and allowable for me to relate from him is published in this book—So that, in fact, if he had been guilty of any treasonable practices, or unwarily admitted to his acquaintance any persons of suspicious character, he had anticipated the intentions of government, by a voluntary renunciation of all company; and I presume it will hardly be said, that four or five very unambitious men, of whom I was one, having occasional admittance to pass an hour with him in a morning, could have any very serious designs to overturn the state, or to dethrone the King.

Now, Sir, with respect to his prophecies in general. I must own, that, as far as it has

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come to my knowledge, all those which he has recorded in print, have either actually been already fulfilled, or remain in a state, of which it cannot with any propriety be asserted, that their completion is impossible. If it be a fact, as I myself do not hesitate to declare my unqualified belief, that he *did* write to the King, to You, Sir, to his Majesty's ministers, and others, in the manner, and on the dates which he has particularized, many others of his predictions have been fulfilled also; *but this I roundly maintain, and defy any man to prove the contrary*, that of his prophecies, as here published, *not one has hitherto turned out to be false*; and all the miserable attempts, in miserable pamphlets, to fritter them away, or demonstrate their failure, have ended in the disgrace of their authors.

Among the denunciations yet unfulfilled, and which I, in common with every other man, sincerely hope may never be fulfilled, are some which relate to this parliament, and to the house where I am now speaking. If
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it be true, Sir, that I have still any friends here, who would kindly interpose to save me from that precipice of obloquy and disgrace, down which they think I am about to rush, in consequence of my present motion, I hope they will not deem it unpardonable in me to be guided by a similar sentiment, and to act upon the same motives of pure philanthropy, however erroneous. I *may* be so unhappy as to apprehend their standing on the very brink of a precipice infinitely more alarming; and, to say the truth, *it is my opinion*. Sir, I knew Mr. Brothers but a very short time before I published a small pamphlet, which, I hope, every gentleman here has received. I never saw either of these books of prophecies, or indeed heard of them, until the 5th of January last, and the 10th of the same month was the first time I ever saw their Author. I read his works, and compared them with the scriptures, as advised. I declare, upon my honour, this is the whole and entire ground of the present bias of my thoughts,

which, in one sense, may certainly be called my conversion. I confess, indeed, that having a good deal of leisure, I took considerable pains on the subject; and by frequent perusals, discovered a variety of connections and coincidences between the several parts of his works with each other, and between the whole and the scriptures, which, at the first sight, had totally escaped my attention. Is it very unreasonable or indecent on my part, to wish that gentlemen would apply some part of the leisure of the approaching recess of parliament, to a deliberate perusal of the same works? Can any detriment result from it? Is it impossible that God should once more interfere in human affairs, as we have the recorded testimony of the bible to prove he did formerly? This is all I ask.

Gentlemen will undoubtedly recollect frequent and palpable inattentions, both of governments and whole nations, to discoveries of the utmost importance, and which have afterwards given a new turn to the affairs,

fairs of mighty empires. To instance only one case: by how many crowned heads and powerful countries was Columbus rejected, when he offered practically to demonstrate the existence of the western continent? The thing was deemed impossible; the very supposition, perhaps, was treated by many as impious. Facts, however, have since borne sufficient evidence to the solidity of his opinions, and left nothing but regret and remorse to those who had too precipitately despised him.

Mr. Brothers in his 2d book, page 23 in my edition, says, "He was commanded by the Lord God to go to the parliament house, on the 17th of May 1792, and acquaint the members, for their own personal safety, and the general benefit of the country, that the time of the world was come to fulfil the 7th chapter of the prophecy of Daniel," &c. Much as I may regret, and much as all of us may, perhaps, have occasion to regret, that he was at that time dismissed (for
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so he says) with unfeeling contempt and incivility from our door, since the subsequent unfortunate events which he mentions to have been ordered to communicate to us, that they might have been averted, cannot now be prevented or reversed: still I may hope that the very coincidence of these events with his predictions, may have some weight with us, not to reject him unheard for the future; and for this reason, had he now been at liberty, I should certainly have moved that he be admitted to the bar of the house, and there be suffered to declare to us any thing he might yet have it in command from God to say. But that I may exhibit that unfeigned submission, which I most assuredly feel, towards the executive government of this country, I beg leave now to offer, and I most earnestly intreat to be permitted, to lay on your table a copy of his works, for the use of such of the members as may chuse to peruse them. I must confess, that I cannot charge my recollection with any instance of any printed papers having been so presented; and,

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therefore, I am utterly at a loss to know, if a paper so circumstanced be admissible. To obviate, therefore, this cause of rejection, I have taken the liberty to bring with me a complete copy of Mr. Brothers's works, which I had caused to be bound for my own use, and which I have inserted, with my own hand, a great number of notes, elucidations, and similar passages from scripture; all of which I conceive to be perfectly accessible to your table, by the rules and forms of the house; assuring you, Sir, that I should not have presumed to intrude any observations of mine on your notice, if any other mode, on the spur of the occasion, had suggested itself to my mind. Notwithstanding, I really venture, with all humility, to offer my opinion, that much labour of reference and comparison (which is not always a pleasant task) would be saved to those honourable gentlemen who should deem the whole worthy of their attention, by the pains I have taken in arranging and adjusting the various correspondent passages. And with

this view, I beg leave to observe, that if my motion for bringing the book on your table be granted, I shall then move that it be printed for the use of the members.

Mr. Halhed then concluded with moving, "That there be laid before this House a copy of the books written by Richard Brothers, called a Revealed Knowledge of the Prophecies and Times, &c."

FINIS.
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